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ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Human rights and extreme poverty

Report submitted by Ms. A.-M. Lizin, independent expert, pursuant to Commission resolution 1998/25

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INTRODUCTION

1. One fifth of humanity lives in absolute poverty. The General Assembly estimated in 1996 (resolution 51/178) that more than 1.3 billion people in the world, a majority of whom are women, live in absolute poverty, especially in developing countries, and the number of such people continues to increase.

2. In its resolution 1998/25, the Commission on Human Rights, recalling that the eradication of widespread poverty, including its most persistent forms, and the full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights remained interrelated goals and deeply concerned that extreme poverty continued to spread throughout the world, regardless of economic, social or cultural situations, and that its extent and manifestations were particularly severe in developing countries, decided to appoint, for a period of two years, an independent expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty with the following mandate:

(a) To evaluate the relationship between the promotion and protection of human rights and extreme poverty, including through the evaluation of measures taken at the national and international levels to promote the full enjoyment of human rights by persons living in extreme poverty;

(b) To take into account in particular the obstacles encountered and progress made by women living in extreme poverty as regards the enjoyment of their fundamental rights;

(c) To make recommendations and, as appropriate, proposals in the sphere of technical assistance;

(d) To report on these activities to the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-fifth and fifty-sixth sessions and to make those reports available to the Commission for Social Development and the Commission on the Status of Women, as appropriate, for their sessions during the same years;

(e) To contribute to the General Assembly's evaluation in the year 2000 of the World Summit for Social Development by making his or her final report and conclusions available to the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly devoted to that evaluation; and

(f) To make suggestions to the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-fifth session on the main points of a possible draft declaration on human rights and extreme poverty so that the Commission can consider the possibility of initiating at the fifty-first session of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities the drafting by that body of a text for examination by the Commission and possible adoption by the General Assembly, and to take into account in that regard, inter alia, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, the Agenda for Development and the final report of Mr. Leandro Despouy (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13).

3. By letter of 12 August 1998, the Chairman of the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Human Rights informed Ms. Anne-Marie Lizin (Belgium) of her appointment as independent expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty.

4. Since her appointment, the independent expert held permanent consultations with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and visited several countries (Albania, Bulgaria, France, Portugal and Yemen) where she held consultations with Governments, international organizations, United Nations bodies, Programmes and Funds, as well as key non-governmental organizations with extensive knowledge on human rights and extreme poverty.

5. In the present report, the international standards relevant to the eradication of extreme poverty, as well as States' obligations, are reviewed, taking into account the obstacles encountered by women living in extreme poverty. Actions at the international and national levels aiming at eradicating extreme poverty are also dealt with. Moreover, some national case studies were carried out. Finally, some interim conclusions and recommendations are drawn up.

I. EXTREME POVERTY AS A VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

6. In 1996 the Special Rapporteur appointed by the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities Mr. Leandro Despouy, submitted his final report on human rights and extreme poverty (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13). He concluded, inter alia, that the fight to eradicate poverty required not only detailed knowledge of the causes and factors which give rise to, aggravate and perpetuate it, but also of its impact on human rights and fundamental freedoms as a whole. It was essential to set in motion machinery for participation which involved the poorest at every stage of the policies devised to help them (para. 204).

7. According to the definition of extreme poverty endorsed by the Special Rapporteur in Annex III to his final report, "the lack of basic security connotes the absence of one or more factors enabling individuals and families to assume basic responsibilities and to enjoy fundamental rights. The situation may become widespread and result in more serious and permanent consequences. The lack of basic security leads to chronic poverty when it simultaneously affects several aspects of people's lives, when it is prolonged and when it severely compromises people's chances of regaining their rights and of reassuring their responsibilities in the foreseeable future".

A. International standards

8. The right to an adequate standard of living, ensuring freedom from want, is an integral and inalienable human right affirmed in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, article 25 of which stipulates that

> "1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and

the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

"2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection".

9. Poverty and inequality are therefore violations of these human rights and others such as the right to life, the right to participate, freedom of expression and association, and the principle of non-discrimination. Poverty is the principal cause of human rights violations in the world. It also prevents people from assuming not only their duties as individuals, but also their collective duties as citizens, parents, workers and electors.

10. Further to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights recognized that the ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and want can be achieved only if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his/her economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his/her civil and political rights.

11. Article 6 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights proclaims that "every human being has the inherent right to life". The Human Rights Committee, in its General Comment 6 on article 6, noted that "... the right to life has been too often narrowly interpreted. The expression 'inherent right to life' cannot properly be understood in a restrictive manner, and the protection of this right requires that States adopt positive measures. In this connection, the Committee considers that it would be desirable for States Parties to take all possible measures to reduce infant mortality and to increase life expectancy, especially in adopting measures to eliminate malnutrition and epidemics".

12. In article 11 (1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, States parties recognized "the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international cooperation based on free consent".

13. In addition, article 12 (1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognized "the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health". Steps to be taken by States parties shall include the reduction of the stillbirth-rate and of infant mortality and for the healthy development of the child; the improvement of all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene; the prevention, treatment and control of epidemic, endemic, occupational and other diseases; and the creation of conditions which would assure to all medical service and medical attention in the event of sickness (art. 12 (2)).

14. Moreover, article 13 (1) recognized the right of everyone to education aiming at, inter alia, the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity. States parties shall strengthen the respect for human

rights and fundamental freedoms. Education shall also enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society. Primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all (art. 13 (2) (a)). Each State party shall undertake, within two years, to work out and adopt a detailed plan of action for the progressive implementation, within a reasonable number of years to be fixed in the plan, of the principle of compulsory education free of charge for all (art. 14).

15. On the other hand, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination stipulates that States parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment, inter alia, of economic, social and cultural rights, in particular:

"(i) The rights to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work, to protection against unemployment, to equal pay for equal work, to just and favourable remuneration;

"(ii) The right to form and join trade unions;

"(iii) The right to housing;

"(iv) The right to public health, medical care, social security and social services;

"(v) The right to education and training;

"(vi) The right to equal participation in cultural activities" (art. 5 (e)).

16. Moreover, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women establishes that States parties shall take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the fields of employment (art. 11) and health care (art. 12), as well as other areas of economic and social life (art. 13). In addition, article 14 (1) stipulates that States parties "shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families." Article 14 (2) calls for measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, the right:

"(a) To participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;

"(b) To have access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counselling and services in family planning;

"(c) To benefit directly from social security programmes;

"(d) To obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, ... in order to increase their technical proficiency;

"(e) To organize self-help groups and cooperatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self-employment;

"(f) To participate in all community activities;

"(g) To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes;

"(h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications."

17. Finally, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, recognizes in article 24 (1) the child's right to the highest attainable standard of health. In particular, States parties shall take appropriate measures:

"(a) To diminish infant and child mortality;

"(b) To ensure the provision of necessary medical assistance and health care to all children with emphasis on the development of primary health care;

"(c) To combat disease and malnutrition through, inter alia, ... the provision of adequate nutrition foods and clean drinking-water ...;

"(d) To ensure appropriate pre-natal and post-natal health care for mothers;

"(e) To ensure that all segments of society ... have ... basic knowledge of child health and nutrition, the advantages of breastfeeding, hygiene and environmental sanitation ...;

"(f) To develop preventive health care ..." (art. 24 (2)).

In addition, article 27 (1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. Whereas the parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure the conditions of living necessary for the child's development (art. 27 (2)), States parties shall take appropriate measures to assist parents to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing (art. 27 (3)).

B. States' obligations

18. Article 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights deals with the general obligations of States in the implementation of the rights recognized in the Covenant. In particular, article 2 (1) establishes that each State party "undertakes to take steps, individually and through international assistance and cooperation, especially economic and

technical, to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized in the present Covenant by all appropriate means, including particularly the adoption of legislative measures".

19. In its General Comment 3 (fifth session, 1990), the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights considers that article 2 (1) of the Covenant has set obligations of conduct and obligations of result. In this connection, article 2 (1) imposes two obligations of conduct which are of immediate effect: firstly, the obligation of undertaking to guarantee that relevant rights will be exercised without discrimination; and secondly, the obligation to take steps towards the full realization of the relevant rights within a reasonable time after the Covenant's entry into force for the States concerned.

20. The principal obligation of result reflected in article 2 (1) is to take steps "with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized" in the Covenant. The concept of "progressive realization" constitutes a recognition of the fact that full realization of all economic, social and cultural rights will generally not be able to be achieved in a short period of time. Nevertheless, it imposes an obligation to move as expeditiously and effectively as possible towards that goal. Moreover, any deliberately retrogressive measures in that regard would require the most careful consideration and would need to be fully justified by reference to the totality of the rights provided for in the Covenant and in the context of the full use of the maximum available resources.

21. The Committee is of the view that a minimum core obligation to ensure the satisfaction of, at the very least, minimum essential levels of each of the rights is incumbent upon every State party. Thus, for example, a State party in which any significant number of individuals is deprived of essential foodstuffs, of essential primary health care, of basic shelter and housing, or of the most basic forms of education is, prima facie, failing to discharge its obligations under the Covenant.

22. It must be noted that any assessment as to whether a State has discharged its minimum core obligation must also take account of resource constraints applying within the country concerned. Article 2 (1) obligates each State party to take the necessary steps "to the maximum of its available resources". In order for a State party to be able to attribute its failure to meet at least its minimum core obligation to a lack of available resources, it must demonstrate that every effort has been made to use all resources that are at its disposal in an effort to satisfy, as a matter of priority, those minimum obligations.

23. The obligation remains for a State party to strive to ensure the widest possible enjoyment of the relevant rights under the prevailing circumstances. Moreover, the obligations to monitor the extent of the realization or non-realization of economic, social and cultural rights, and to devise strategies and programmes for their promotion, are not in any way eliminated as a result of resource constraints.

24. Similarly, even in times of severe resources constraints, whether caused by a process of adjustment, of economic recession, or by other factors, the vulnerable members of society can and, indeed, must be protected by the adoption of relatively low-cost targeted programmes.

25. A final element of article 2 (1) is that the undertaking given by all States parties is "to take steps, individually and through international assistance and cooperation, especially economic and technical". The phrase "to the maximum of its available resources" is intended to refer to both the resources existing within a State and those available from the international community through international cooperation and assistance.

26. In practical terms, States' obligations must be seen in the light of the assumptions that human beings, families or wider groups seek to find their own solutions to their needs. Therefore, States should, at the primary level, *respect* the resources owned by the individual or groups seeking to make optimal use of their own knowledge and the freedom of individuals and groups to satisfy their own needs. At a secondary level, States' obligations require active *protection* against other more aggressive subjects, such as protection against fraud or unethical behaviour. At a tertiary level, the State has the obligation to *facilitate* opportunities by which the rights listed can be enjoyed. At the fourth level, the State has the obligation to *fulfil* the rights of those who otherwise cannot enjoy their economic, social and cultural rights.

27. According to the Committee, Articles 55 and 56 of the Charter of the United Nations and the Covenant itself aim at international cooperation for development and for the realization of economic, social and cultural rights as an obligation of all States. It is particularly incumbent upon those States which are in a position to assist others in this regard. The Committee noted in particular the importance of the Declaration on the Right to Development and the need for States parties to take full account of all of the principles recognized therein.

C. Poverty, human rights and development

28. In adopting the Declaration on the Right to Development, the General Assembly, in resolution 41/128, recognized that development is a comprehensive, cultural, political, economic, and social process which aims at constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom.

29. The right to development is an inalienable human right by which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized (art. 1 (1)). The human person is the central subject of development and should be an active participant and beneficiary of the right to development (art. 2 (1)).

30. The World Conference on Human Rights, in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, reaffirmed the right to development as a universal and inalienable right and an integral part of fundamental human rights. While

development facilitated the enjoyment of all human rights, the lack of development could not be invoked to justify the abridgement of internationally recognized human rights (Part I, para. 10).

31. The World Conference on Human Rights also affirmed that extreme poverty and social exclusion constituted a violation of human dignity and that urgent steps were necessary to achieve better knowledge of extreme poverty and its causes, including those related to the problem of development, in order to promote the human rights of the poorest, and to put an end to extreme poverty and social exclusion. To that purpose, it was essential for States to foster participation by the poorest people in the decision-making process by the community in which they live, the promotion of human rights and efforts to combat extreme poverty (ibid., para. 25).

32. The individual's active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of the benefits of development is the basis for the implementation of the 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development. Central to this approach is the realization that all human rights are interdependent and that durable economic and social progress requires civil and political freedoms and vice versa.

33. Implementing the Declaration on the Right to Development means adjusting basic needs strategies to a rights-based approach. According to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the existence of widespread extreme poverty inhibits the full and effective enjoyment of human rights, so that its immediate alleviation and eventual elimination must remain a high priority for the international community (ibid., para. 14).

34. A basic needs strategy incorporates a certain element of charity, whereas a human rights-based approach not only defines beneficiaries and the nature of their needs but recognizes beneficiaries as active subjects and claim-holders and establishes duties or obligations for those against whom a claim can be brought to ensure that needs are met. The concept of claim-holders and duty-bearers introduces an important element of accountability. Increased accountability holds the key to improved effectiveness and transparence of action and as such offers the potential for "added value" flowing from the application of rights-based approach.

35. Addressing the fifty-third session (1997) of the Commission on Human Rights, the Secretary-General stated that "truly sustainable development is possible only when the political, economic and social rights of all people are fully respected. They help to create the social equilibrium which is vital if a society is to evolve in peace. The right to development is the measure of the respect of all other human rights. That should be our aim: a situation in which all individuals are enabled to maximize their potential, and to contribute to the evolution of society as a whole".

36. Consequently, the human right to development is related to all human rights but cannot be identified merely as the sum total of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. Economic growth can be a requirement for the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, but development is not restricted to economic growth, because not all forms of growth would b

compatible with development. The distinguishing criterion should be whether the processes of growth are such that they do not negatively affect civil and political rights and give better protection in terms of economic, social and cultural rights to the most vulnerable and impoverished groups.

II. UNITED NATIONS ACTION TO ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY

37. The world conferences convened by the United Nations during the 1990s have focused on human needs and concluded that development should be sustainable and that priority should be given to the eradication of poverty.

38. At the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, 117 heads of State and Government and the representatives of 186 countries stated, in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development (A/CONF.166/9, chap. I), that the eradication of poverty was an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of mankind. The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action provides the substantive framework for the current drive for eradicating poverty and for planning the efforts of the United Nations system in support of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty.

39. The Summit also set specific targets, drew up plans and implemented programmes. Three years later, 78 countries have national plans to combat poverty or have included poverty reduction in broader national development plans.

40. In resolution 51/178, the General Assembly expressed its solidarity with people living in poverty in all countries and reaffirmed that the satisfaction of basic human needs was an essential element of poverty eradication, those needs being closely interrelated and comprising nutrition, health, water and sanitation, education, employment, housing and participation in cultural and social rights. Along the same lines, the Assembly reaffirmed in resolution 52/193 of 1997 that the causes of poverty should be addressed in the context of sectoral strategies, such as those on environment, food security, population, migration, health, shelter, human resources development, including education, fresh water (clean water and sanitation), rural development, productive employment, and the specific needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, in such a way as to increase opportunities and choices of people living in poverty and enable them to build their strengths and assets so as to achieve social and economic integration.

41. As a result, poverty eradication has become one of the principal areas of concentration throughout the United Nations system. Both the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank have made poverty reduction their predominant objective. Thus, the Human Development Report 1997 and the UNDP Poverty Report 1998, 1/ Overcoming Human Poverty (Vaincre la pauvreté humaine), were entirely devoted to eradication of poverty. The same applies for the Report on the World Social Situation 1997 and the Trade and Development Report 1997.

42. The World Bank believes that creating the conditions for the attainment of human rights is a central and irreducible goal of development. By placing

the dignity of every human being - especially the poorest - at the very foundation of its approach to development, the Bank helps people in every part of the world build lives of purpose and hope. 2/

43. Within the United Nations system, Overcoming Human Poverty, produced with help from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank, has defined four indicators to be used for measuring progress:

(a) Income poverty. The lack of minimally adequate income or expenditures. The global target is to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. The indicator for this will be the poverty headcount ratio - the proportion of the population whose income or consumption falls below US$ 1 per day. On this basis, the required reduction is from 30 per cent to 15 per cent. Built into this target is the requirement that the depth of poverty should not get worse. In addition, each country may replace the US$ 1-per-day threshold with a nationally chosen poverty line.

(b) Relative poverty. Poverty defined by standards that can change across countries or over time. An example is a poverty line set at one-half of mean per capita income. The target is to increase the national consumption of the poorest fifth of the population.

(c) Malnutrition. The global target is that, by 2005, the proportion of malnourished children should halve by 2005 and halve again between 2005 and 2015. The indicator for this will be the proportion of children under five who are underweight.

(d) Literacy. According to UNICEF (The State of the World's Children 1999), there are some 855 million illiterate adults worldwide, two thirds of whom are women. Illiteracy among adults (15-24) must be reduced by three quarters by 2015 and the male and female rates must then be the same. This means that global illiteracy rates for men and women will have to be brought down to 8 per cent by 2015.

A. United Nations Development Programme

44. The Human Development Report 1997 introduced the concept of human poverty, which centres on a denial of the opportunities and choices most basic to human development, such as the opportunity to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-respect and the respect of others. From this perspective, poverty is a process and not a condition. The concept of human poverty looks at the potential of the most deprived and the resources they need to escape from poverty. It also takes account of gender inequality, which makes it possible to examine the way in which household resources - food, education and health services, but also productive resources - are shared among family members.

45. The human poverty indicator (HPI) developed by UNDP includes the proportion of adult illiterates, the proportion of people likely to die before they reach 40, and a third variable - described as a lack of decent living conditions in broad economic terms - represented by a composite sub-indicator

which in turn comprises three variables: the percentage of persons without access to drinking water, of persons without access to health services, and of children aged under five who are underweight.

46. Human rights and sustainable human development are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Development is unsustainable where the rule of law and equity do not exist; where ethnic, religious or sexual discrimination are rampant; where there are restrictions on free speech, free association and the media; or where large numbers of people live in abject and degrading poverty. Similarly, human rights are enhanced when gender equity or poverty reduction programmes empower people to become aware of and claim their rights.

47. UNDP is developing a human rights-based framework in its anti-poverty pro-sustainable human development work. For this purpose, several strategies have particular relevance for human rights, such as targeting disadvantaged or excluded groups (women, children, minorities, migrant workers, people with HIV/AIDS), promoting partnerships with NGOs and civil society organizations, addressing governance issues and strengthening human rights national institutions.

48. Governance has been defined by UNDP as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. Good governance is, among other things, participatory, transparent and accountable. It is also effective, equitable, and promotes the rule of law. Good governance ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources.

B. World Bank

49. The World Bank defines extreme poverty as those living on US$ 1 or less per day. According to the World Bank, the incidence of poverty in developing countries and in countries with economies in transition fell slightly from 30 per cent in 1987 to 29.5 per cent in 1993. But the absolute number of the world's poor rose from 1.23 billion to 1.31 billion during the same year. The overwhelming majority of people living on $1 a day or less are located in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and China, but there are many tens of millions also in Latin America, the Caribbean and Western Asia. There is also considerable poverty in developed countries and in countries with economies in transition.

50. In addition, the World Bank estimated in 1998 that more than 3 billion people in the developing world still struggle in grinding poverty, and the number continues to grow. Every year nearly 8 million children die from diseases caused by dirty water and poisoned air; 50 million children are mentally or physically damaged because of inadequate nutrition, and 130 million - 80 per cent of them girls - are denied a chance to go to school. Today, 150 million children under the age of five are gravely malnourished; another 260 million suffer from anaemia or other vitamin or mineral deficiencies. According to the Bank, in 1998 11 million children will die

unnecessarily from diseases as simple and treatable as diarrhoea. Those children who do survive have little chance for education and the opportunity to escape poverty.

51. Consequently the Bank has placed health and education at the centre of its lending and advisory programmes in the social sector for the poor countries. In fiscal 1998 the Bank allocated to the social sector US$ 8,480 million out of total lending of US$ 28,594 million, including US$ 1.9 billion for health, population and nutrition; US$ 665 million for basic infrastructure such as water supply and sanitation facilities; and US$ 3.1 billion for education, placing greater emphasis on primary education for girls, the rural poor and linguistic minorities.

C. United Nations commitment to eradicate poverty

52. The Statement for Action to Eradicate Poverty, adopted by the Administrative Committee on Coordination in May 1998, reaffirmed that poverty eradication is a key international commitment and a central objective of the United Nations system. The ACC emphasized that poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, as well as a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or a clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, nor having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence and it often implies living in marginal and fragile environments, not having access to clean water and sanitation.

53. The executive heads of agency were convinced that this situation is unacceptable as the world has the resources and the capacity to eradicate absolute poverty. Consequently, they reaffirmed that the United Nations system has an obligation to mobilize the will of the international community to achieve this goal.

54. According to the ACC Statement, protecting the rights of all to a minimum standard of living is good economics because investment in the poor, including women and children, offers the best guarantee of sustained growth and productivity gains in the future. In addition, eradication of poverty is today an indispensable condition for lasting peace. Without the full and effective participation of the poor in global growth, the challenges of peace and development will not be met.

55. The United Nations system must play a supportive and catalytic role in mobilizing the energies and resources of all development actors - Governments, the private sector, civil society, donors and, above all, the poor themselves - in the campaign against poverty. Taken together, development goals address the challenge of poverty eradication. They cover reductions in income poverty, child mortality, maternal mortality and child malnutrition as well as improvements in life expectancy and access to basic social services, especially among women.

56. The ACC also underscored that poverty cannot be eradicated without transparent and accountable government at all levels. Democratization and

enhanced protection of human rights are key components of good governance. It also called for the empowerment of the poor, their active involvement and participation in poverty reduction strategies and improved access by the poor to well-functioning institutions, such as those in the political and judicial systems.

57. Since poverty reduction can only be achieved through accelerated and sustained economic growth, Governments should carry out the necessary economic reforms which balance growth with social investments. Growth should be equitable, employment intensive and pro-poor, underpinned by sound policies to promote social justice and redress social inequities. It also requires special measures to increase the access of the poor to productive assets, including land and credit, and to make them economic, social and civil actors. Moreover, it requires sound environmental policies and access by the poor to resource- and energy-saving technologies and environmental education.

58. Natural disasters such as drought and floods, war, economic shocks and epidemics such as HIV/AIDS can result in serious losses for the poor - losses in jobs, incomes and assets. Society must be ready to provide safety nets in such circumstances. These would include employment and income-generating programmes, social assistance, targeted support for the elderly and disabled, programmes assisting the internally displaced, and food transfers.

59. The ACC stressed that empowerment, participation and social capital are important means for action against poverty, as well as ends in themselves. Mobilizing social capital calls for institutional changes which support empowerment of the poor and the full realization of their rights as citizens. It demands promoting the advancement of women, as well as of marginalized groups such as indigenous peoples, those living in remote areas and refugees. All countries should extend their full support to such strategies with a view to achieving development and peace by addressing the root causes of poverty.

60. International economic relations should emphasize economic access for the poor. This requires creating policies and conditions which would enable developing countries, particularly the least developed among them, to benefit from opportunities in trade, investment and technology transfer brought about by globalization. This also entails adopting creative approaches to debt management, relief and reduction in order to free up resources poor countries need to combat poverty. The flow and quality of official development assistance must also be improved.

61. An international campaign against poverty calls for continuing measurement and monitoring implemented with the participation of all affected groups. The executive heads were convinced that accountability, transparency and inclusion at all levels are integral to achieving the goals of poverty eradication.

62. Finally, the ACC reaffirmed that every organization of the system is committed not only to strengthening its own action, but also to working with others to fight poverty in all its forms. The executive heads agreed to identify areas for common action and build partnerships among concerned organizations.

D. Transfer of resources

63. The fight against poverty implies transfer of resources. In this context, it is important for donor countries urgently to reverse the decline in official development assistance to developing countries, which amounted to just 0.25 per cent of the gross domestic product in 1996, the lowest figure recorded in the last 50 years.

64. The anti-poverty effort will require a transfer of resources to the social sectors. Currently, the overall ratio is relatively low in developing countries: partial data suggest that about 13 per cent of national budgets are being spent on basic services. According to UNDP, the additional cost of combating poverty is about US$ 40 billion a year over the 10 years to 2005, including basic education for all ($6 billion; $7 billion according to UNICEF figures), basic health and nutrition ($13 billion), reproductive health and family planning ($12 billion), and low-cost water supply and sanitation ($9 billion). In a world economy of $25 trillion, poverty eradication is affordable. Most of the resources can come from restructuring existing budgets. For universal access to basic social services, about $30 billion could come from national budgets and perhaps $10 billion from international aid.

65. Moreover, the cost of closing the gap between the annual income of poor people and the minimum income at which they would no longer be in extreme poverty amounts to another $40 billion a year. So that to provide universal access to basic social services and transfers to alleviate income poverty would cost roughly $80 billion. That is less than 0.5 per cent of global income and less than the combined net worth of the seven richest men in the world. Lack of political commitment, not financial resources, is the real obstacle to poverty eradication.

66. In this regard, the General Assembly, in resolution 52/193, called upon developed countries to commit the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product for overall development assistance and, within that target, to earmark 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of GNP for the least developed countries. Moreover, the Assembly called upon all donors to give high priority to the eradication of poverty in their assistance budgets and programmes, on both bilateral and multilateral basis. As the Secretary-General noted in his report on the implementation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, so far, only Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden have met or exceeded the 0.7 per cent target (A/53/329, para. 50).

67. In the same resolution, the Assembly called upon developed and developing countries to allocate 20 per cent of their official development assistance, and 20 per cent of the national budget, respectively, to basic social programmes. It also reaffirmed that promoting access for all to basic social services was essential for sustainable development and should be an integral part of any strategy to overcome poverty. The 20/20 Initiative should include basic education, primary health care, including reproductive health and population programmes, nutrition programmes and safe drinking water and sanitation, as well as the institutional capacity for delivering those services.

68. In addition, the international community should continue its efforts regarding debt relief for developing countries, with a view to contributing to a durable solution to the debt problems of developing countries, particularly Africa and the least developed countries, and thus support their efforts to eradicate poverty. The total debt of developing countries has risen relentlessly from $1.6 trillion in 1993 to $1.9 trillion in 1995. Debt servicing payments contribute to poverty when public revenue is diverted from productive sector expenditure, such as education, health and physical infrastructure to debt servicing (ibid., para. 49).

69. According to the World Bank, for approximately 40 poor and highly indebted countries, official debt has grown so high that Governments are finding it difficult to both service their debt and make important investments in health and education. In September 1996 the Bank, with the International Monetary Fund, endorsed the establishment of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC). It focuses on debt sustainability and providing debt relief by all creditors, including multilateral institutions. The initiative cuts debt servicing payments within a sustainable development strategy, with particular focus on investments in primary health care and education.

70. However, it has become apparent to UNDP that the HIPC initiative has a number of shortcomings. One of the most serious is the measure of sustainability - which is based on the ratio of the total value of public debt to the value of exports of goods and services. Moreover, in order to benefit from the initiative, countries must demonstrate a six-year track record of structural adjustment. Given the slow progress of HIPC, UNDP has suggested that debt should be reduced to a level at which it no longer constitutes a significant obstacle to sustaining human development. Under this arrangement, basic human development expenditures would not be considered part of the fiscal base for debt-servicing.

71. The alternative approach would reduce debt to a level at which essential human development expenditures could be maintained. On this basis, the debt of 10 of the poorest countries would have to be reduced to zero - Burundi, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and the United Republic of Tanzania. And for other countries it would have to be reduced by 80 per cent - Angola, Burkina Faso, Congo, Guinea Bissau, Madagascar, Nicaragua, Nigeria, São Tomé and Principe, Yemen, and Zambia. The total cost of debt reduction following these principles would be around US$ 160 billion, or double what is proposed in the HIPC initiative. Two thirds of this might be expected to come from bilateral agencies and one third from the multilaterals.

72. It is also encouraged to increase access to microcredit and related financial services for self-employment and income-generating activities for people living in poverty, in particular women in developing countries, particularly in Africa and the least developed countries. More than 500 million of the world's poor run profitable small and microbusinesses. Yet fewer than 2 per cent of low income entrepreneurs and producers have access to financial services. Too many are forced to mortgage their security by turning to money lenders who charge extortionate interest and threaten

harsh penalties. For both moral and economic reasons, reducing dependency on usury and widening access to credit at viable commercial rates is a high priority.

73. Several micro-credit experiences have been developed by the United Nations Secretariat, the specialized agencies and United Nations Funds and Programmes. Among them, "Sustainable Banking for the Poor" (SBP) is a joint programme by the World Bank, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Norway, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Ford Foundation aiming at building sustainable financing institutions that are effective in reaching the poor. Case studies in Asia, Africa and Latin America cover a wide range of types of institutions and programmes, including commercial banks, specialized banks, credit unions, non-governmental organizations and non-bank financial institutions.

74. In August 1997, UNDP created the Special Unit for Microfinance (SUM) to bring together, and build synergy between, the growing microfinance work of UNDP and established credit and microfinance activities. Since many microfinance institutions fail because they lack key support at the initial stage of their development, UNDP has contracted organizations such as the Grameen Bank and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) to help them through extensive training and support.

75. UNDP has also set up a Small Grants Programme (SGP) within the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which has a number of projects reducing poverty in environmentally supportive ways. The programme aims to demonstrate the effectiveness of a decentralized funding mechanism based upon community participation and local decision-making in project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

76. The "Assisting Communities Together" (ACT) Project is a new initiative of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights designed to empower people at the local level to undertake activities to promote and protect human rights by providing small grants up to US$ 2,000. The project is highlighting the importance of local human rights initiatives which, though small in scale, can make a vital contribution to the improvement of the human rights record at the national and local levels. The pilot phase of the ACT Project has been launched in 26 countries.

77. Some 10 million women worldwide now have access to the microcredit system. Participants in the Microcredit Summit, held in Washington, D.C. in February 1997, undertook to see that the figure would be 100 million in 2005.

78. However, microfinance is not a magic formula for reducing poverty. Poor people have long been used to taking out small consumer loans, but it is harder for microcredit systems to help the poor to set up income-generating activities of any size (see A/53/223, paras. 13-15). Without successful income-generating activities that enable loans to be repaid, microfinance institutions find it difficult to survive; many of them were heavily subsidized in the past.

79. As the Secretary-General observed in his report on the role of microcredit in the eradication of poverty, credit needs to be supplemented

with access to land and appropriate technology. It also requires strong support from the public sector. In addition, lack of access to land is the most critical single cause of rural poverty, which dominates the poverty situation in some of the lowest-income countries. Yet, few countries have substantial land reform programmes (ibid., para. 16).

80. In conclusion, if microcredit is to play a strong role in development, it has to be perceived as part of a comprehensive programme of support to the small enterprise sector. This would entail Governments of developing countries formulating plans and programmes to support small enterprises in general, of which micro-credit should be an integral part (ibid., para. 32).

81. Finally, the United Nations is encouraging States to reduce excessive military expenditures on and investments in arms production and acquisition, in order to increase resources for social and economic development, in particular to poverty eradication programmes in developing countries, particularly African countries and the least developed countries. Serving a global community of 185 States and some 6 billion people, the United Nations has $4.6 billion a year to spend on economic and social development. This is the equivalent of 80 cents per human being, compared with the $134 a person spent annually on arms and the military. 3/

III. ACTION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

82. All Governments shall formulate integrated poverty eradication strategies and policies and implement national poverty eradication plans or programmes in a participatory manner, to address the structural causes of poverty, encompassing action at local, national, subregional, regional and international levels. Those plans should establish, within each national context, strategies and affordable time-bound goals and targets for the substantial reduction of overall poverty and the eradication of absolute poverty.

83. The United Nations Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) adopted in September 1998 a matrix entitled "Freedom from Poverty: Actions and Partnerships" for inclusion in its Operational Activities Reference Manual. The matrix provides a common United Nations approach to poverty eradication and people-centred sustainable development. In particular, the following action areas are suggested:

(a) Creating a broad enabling environment to combat poverty and promote pro-poor economic growth (through both internal and external measures);

(b) Investing in and maintaining needed physical infrastructure, including infrastructure targeted for low-income communities;

(c) Promoting access to basic social services for all, including health, reproductive health and family planing services, education and sanitation, adopting special measures to reach women and children;

(d) Securing sustainable livelihoods for the poor, including access to productive assets such as credit;

(e) Advancing gender equality and equity, including the economic, legal and political empowerment of women;

(f) Ensuring sustainable food security in low-income households and the right to food;

(g) Regenerating the natural resource base on which the poor depend;

(h) Good governance and political empowerment of the poor; and

(i) Providing social protection for vulnerable people, including indigenous peoples.

84. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) has developed a list of indicators to facilitate the United Nations system's assessments at the country level. Account has been taken of the World Summit for Children, the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. All United Nations Funds and Programmes conducting development activities in a country shall join together, under the leadership of the resident coordinator, to prepare UNDAF, in full consultation with the Government concerned as well as with civil society, local NGOs and international donors. Entities such as the specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions are encouraged to join in the preparation of UNDAF, in order to maximize the United Nations system's collaboration in support of country priorities.

85. Some of these indicators are particularly relevant for the eradication of extreme poverty, among them the estimated population size by age and sex, urban-rural population distribution, life expectancy at birth, and mortality and fertility indicators such as infant mortality rate by sex, under-five mortality rate by sex, maternal mortality rate, total fertility rate and current population growth rate. Regarding health conditions, UNDAF indicators suggested were: proportion of the population with access to health services; proportion of under-five children underweight by sex; proportion of births attended by appropriately trained health personnel; contraceptive prevalence rate, by method and age; and HIV adult prevalence rate.

86. In addition, the World Social Summit set four immediate health and nutrition related goals: that by the year 2000, life expectancy should be not less than 60 years in any country; mortality rates of infants and children under five years should be reduced by one third of the 1990 level or 50 to 70 per 1,000 live births, whichever is less; reduction in maternal mortality by one half of the 1990 level; and attainment by all peoples of the world of a level of health that will permit them to lead a socially and economically productive life and, to this end, ensuring primary health care for all.

87. As regards education, UNDAF used indicators reflecting the basic educational status of the population, with emphasis on basic education. They are: adult literacy rate by sex; net primary enrolment ratio by sex; per cent reaching grade 5; and net secondary enrolment ratio by sex.

88. Since universal primary education is central in the fight against poverty, the World Social Summit set a target of universal access to basic education and completion of primary education by at least 80 per cent of primary school-age children by the year 2000. Enrolment in secondary education still remains unsatisfactory despite progress. Developing countries as a whole increased gross enrolment ratios from 42 per cent in 1990 to 46 per cent in 1993. In comparison, there is 95 per cent enrolment in the industrialized countries and in countries with economies in transition.

89. As regards the gender gap, in a majority of countries the illiteracy rate among women is significantly higher than for men. According to the World Education Report 1995 published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, in 65 countries the gap between the male and female adult literacy rates is estimated to be higher than 10 per cent; in another 40 countries, it is estimated to be higher than 20 per cent. Adult illiteracy is still increasing in sub-Saharan Africa, Arab States and southern Asia, with women forming a substantial majority in each case.

90. UNDAF income and employment indicators are focused on how they affect people's well-being in terms of income levels, employment and poverty: GNP per capita and average annual growth rate for the last 10-year period (in constant US dollars); percentage of population below the poverty line by sex (and for those younger than 18 years old), calculated according to monetary value of the minimum food basket and food expenditures as a percentage of total expenditures; percentage of labour force engaged in agriculture, industry and services by sex and by status (employer, self-employer, employee and unpaid family worker); and percentage of children aged 10-14 who are working.

91. The World Social Summit set the goal of achieving food security for all. In the developing world, the absolute number and the proportion of undernourished people fell between 1990 and 1992, but in 30 countries the percentage increased. All in all, about 840 million people in the developing world were undernourished in the early 1990s. The situation was worse in sub-Saharan Africa, where the number of undernourished people doubled, affecting 43 per cent of the total population in 1990-1992. The World Food Summit in 1996 adopted as a target the reduction in the number of undernourished people to half the 1996 level by 2015. A mid-term review is to be held to ascertain whether it is possible to achieve that target by 2010.

92. UNDAF Habitat (housing conditions and people's access to supportive infrastructure) indicators shall include: percentage of population with access to adequate sanitation, safe drinking water and electricity; and number of people per room (excluding bathroom).

93. UNDAF environmental indicators shall include as: arable land per capita; percentage change in total square kilometres of forest land in the last 10 years; and percentage of the population that relies on traditional fuels for energy use.

94. Human security and social justice shall be checked against indicators showing whether social conditions provide personal security, such as freedom from violence and equitable opportunities for human development. Indicators shall refer to: number of victims of violence per 1,000 people by sex and

age; and number of persons in prison per 100,000 people. Indicators of gender inequality and any other inequalities, such as those by age and by ethnic origin, shall also be included.

95. Finally, United Nations Funds, Programmes and agencies should promote a policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective and use gender analysis as a tool for the integration of a gender dimension into the planning and implementation of policies, strategies and programmes on poverty eradication.

IV. STUDY CASES

96. In 1998, the independent expert visited five countries - Albania, Bulgaria, France, Portugal and Yemen - where she found that efforts to combat poverty had had positive results. Some of these States had enacted excellent legislation which could serve as a model for other countries. Comparative analysis of legislation, despite its limitations, can help to reduce the timescale for action considerably: this occurred, for example, with France's Act against Social Exclusion in France and Portugal's Guaranteed Minimum Income Act.

A. Portugal

97. The independent expert visited Portugal on 29 and 30 October 1998. Of all European countries, it is Portugal that has most recently tried to enact a range of instruments to combat poverty; these include the Act of 29 June 1996, introducing a guaranteed minimum income of 23,000 escudos per month, and targeting in particular women and children (who comprise 43 per cent of its beneficiaries).

98. The Act was accompanied by a decree-law establishing local boards (324 nationwide) to administer the guaranteed minimum wage; they are a key element in what is an example of good governance on poverty in the developed world, grounded in the reinforcement of the local mutual aid network by linking official administrators with community organizations.

99. Some 70,000 persons have also benefited from specific job training programmes. Job placement is a local responsibility assumed by private NGOs with seats on the local boards. Funding is provided partly by the State and in some cases from resources provided by the NGOs on the local boards.

B. Bulgaria

100. During her stay in Bulgaria, from 11 to 18 November 1998, the independent expert had meetings with the country's highest authorities and with all services responsible for combating poverty. As a country in transition, restructuring has undoubtedly taken its toll, but the Government is working with the World Bank and in close collaboration with the United Nations system on a serious anti-poverty programme, coordinated at the national level by UNDP.

101. A Social Investment Fund has been set up to create jobs through microprojects or small businesses. A law enacted in September 1998 aims to restore "health security" by 2000 for polyclinics and by 2001 for hospitals.

In addition, a guaranteed minimum income was established under an Act dated 1 September 1998 and in agreement with IMF, although it is very low (32,400 leva - 32 DM - per month).

102. Nevertheless, insufficient attention is paid to certain vulnerable groups such as the disabled, street children, those who have no access to school and Gypsy children, as well as very poor women - female unemployment in Bulgaria having risen from 52 per cent to 68 per cent.

103. The role of the National Council on Ethnic Problems should be promoted in order to increase direct participation by the socially excluded. The role of local communities in identifying poverty and providing welfare should also be developed. Lastly, the growing role of mafias and corruption rings should be carefully monitored, since their members are recruited from among the most disadvantaged.

C. Yemen

104. The independent expert visited Yemen between 11 and 14 November 1998 and met with high authorities and officials in charge of social welfare programmes. The National Report on Human Development for 1998 showed that social services expenditure has gone down, particularly in the health and education sectors, and that increased poverty has affected 51 per cent of the population. Between 1991 and 1996, wages also dropped by 70 per cent. The World Bank is blamed for not having protected the education and health budgets. On the other hand, it has taken positive action through the Social Development Fund, supporting microfinance, community programmes and the strengthening of civil institutions.

105. The Government has initiated a literacy programme, which also targets women; a birth control programme (which is not felt to be very effective, mainly owing to the cost of contraceptives); and the Social Development Fund, which provides the very poor with a minimum income of 100 rials (approximately US$ 1), to offset the effects of the World Bank's structural adjustment programme.

106. The Government has also established a National Human Rights Commission under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose priorities are information on the rights of the child (radio and television campaign); information on education for girls (the same type of campaign); the separation of adolescents and adults in prisons; and the situation of women prisoners, many of whom are rejected by their families because they have been accused of adultery and whose only hope of survival is to stay in prison.

107. Lastly, a Social Welfare Fund provides social welfare in Yemen following the principles of decentralization and information. In 1999 the Fund's beneficiaries will number 350,000 of whom 70 per cent will be women (widows, divorcees or with no family).

D. Proposals for action and results of experience

108. Table 1 below shows the legislative initiatives to be promoted in combating poverty; table 2 reveals the relationship between human rights and extreme poverty.

Table 1

Legislative initiatives to be promoted

Country	1 Guaranteed minimum income	2 Micro-finance	3 Local authority involvement	4 Social investment funds	5 Occupational reintegration	6 Promotion of girls' education	7 Prisons (bills)	8 Legal aid	9 Involvement in information programmes for poorest of poor	10 Police	11 Anti-corruption act
France	X		X		X		X	X (goals: free legal aid)	X	X	
Portugal	X		X	X (pilot)	X	X			X	X	
Bulgaria	X	X	X	X (pilot)	X	X			X		X
Yemen	X	X	X	X	X	X	X (trial phase)		X		X

Table 2

Human rights and extreme poverty

Reference grid (part 1)

	1 Guaranteed minimum income (Act)	2 Micro finance and banking procedures in place	3 Local authorities with real power to help	4 Social investment funds	5 Social welfare-employment link through occupational reintegration
Recommended reference texts	French, Portuguese, Yemeni Acts	European Commission Com (1998) 527 final (and pilot legislation in Bulgaria)	Bulgarian and Portuguese Acts	Yemen Bulgaria	Belgian and Portuguese Acts
Civil and political rights (social dignity)			Bulgaria: local democracy essential in giving every citizen a say	Yemen: participation important: NGOs can propose projects to the Fund	Occupational reintegration is key to social dignity and helps escape from poverty and dependence (French, Belgian Acts)
Right to education	Allows enjoyment of right to education, in particular by covering cost		Portugal: local boards extremely important; receive government financial support	Yemen: Fund plays important role; piloted by National Bank	Training for recipients of guaranteed minimum income and obligation to place beneficiaries in employment programmes run by public authorities (France, Belgium) Portugal has National Fund for companies promoting reintegration
Right to housing	Good example of French Act	Provides basic income to meet cost of rent (Yemen, Bulgaria)	Bulgaria: Welfare tied to housing unit Portugal: Financial support for local councils	Yemen: Piloted by World Bank - well adapted	Local authority role in reintegration in Portugal (local reintegration boards)

	1 Guaranteed minimum income (Act)	2 Micro finance and banking procedures in place	3 Local authorities with real power to help	4 Social investment funds	5 Social welfare-employment link through occupational reintegration
Right to health	French Act (reference text), special section on medical welfare. In Yemen, sufficient for access to hospital	Pilot phase in Bulgaria, but still too little financing for projects for disabled	Bulgaria: drive to restore health security in 2000 for polyclinics, 2001 for hospitals	Yemen: support for primary health-care centres Bulgaria: pilot phase	
Right to financial assistance for food	French Act Portuguese Act (one-year pilot experiment) Yemeni Act (Social Welfare Fund)	Problems in Yemen (need to go through NGOs as banks refuse)	Portugal: local board with locally-elected members and NGO for initial social survey (in each town) Bulgaria and Yemen		
Women's rights	Equal rights to income for men and women (but linked to family situation)	Women's access to same financing: Yemeni banks reluctant Bulgaria developing	Portugal: wide powers Bulgaria: welfare for women	Women's access depends on family situation: great efforts made in Yemen	Portugal: compulsory enrolment in reintegration programme, for women as well

Table 2

Human rights and extreme poverty

Reference grid (part 2)

	6 Programmes to promote girls' education (reduction in cost)	7 Programmes in prisons (adolescents, release)	8 Legal aid for the poorest of the poor	9 Programme to involve the poorest (information on their rights)	10 Programme in police services	11 Non-corrupt tax and legal system
Reference	Yemen	Yemen	Belgium	Portugal	Belgium-Portugal	
Civil and political rights		Imprisonment of the very poor for not paying a fine. Should be abolished and replaced by other penalties	Priority aim in France, Portugal, Belgium	Outreach to churches, schools, mosques Locally and nationally elected representatives (Yemen) Special cases of illegals in Europe Bulgaria: National council on Ethnic Problems		As a matter of principle, combating corruption is an essential component
Right to education	Essential in Yemen to prioritize girls' schools of which there are very few Portugal: nursery schools recently introduced nationwide			Portugal: special training for the most disadvantaged groups, identified by local board (citizens education board) Bulgaria: special programmes with UNDP For the excluded, marginalized, retirees, single mothers and Gypsies		Releases essential financial resources
Right to housing						Releases financial resources

	6 Programmes to promote girls' education (reduction in cost)	7 Programmes in prisons (adolescents, release)	8 Legal aid for the poorest of the poor	9 Programme to involve the poorest (information on their rights)	10 Programme in police services	11 Non-corrupt tax and legal system
Right to health	Yemen: birth control programme (but contraceptives unaffordable)			Availability at health centres allows contact with poorest of poor		Releases financial resources
Right to food subsidy				Food-distribution centre	Police could be trained to give guidance to those who need the subsidy	Bulgaria: problem of Mafia, which uses poorest of the poor
Women's rights	First step in Yemen: minimum age for marriage Media campaign (TV spots) on rights of the child	Appalling situation of poor women in prison. Great need for care on release also		Prostitution: move towards ban	Need to set up "youth sections" in police services	

V. TECHNICAL COOPERATION

109. Technical cooperation programmes to ensure respect for the rights of the poorest of the poor should be available on request to any Government. Such programmes should include at least the following components:

A. Civil and political rights of the very poor

1. Police training in social work.

2. Creation of a women's section in each police department.

3. Legal-aid training for court officials and lawyers.

4. Training for prison managers and officials of ministries of justice.

5. Special training in women's prisons to encourage the establishment of reception facilities.

B. Education in and information on the rights of the very poor

1. Special resources to help reach the very poor to be provided under the programme implemented in collaboration with UNESCO (need for audio-visual aids and campaign).

2. Decentralized training for local authorities.

C. Economic, social and cultural rights

1. Training for political officials in the economic and social rights of the poorest of the poor.

2. General training for field workers in the special nature of extreme poverty.

3. Role of national human rights institutions in incorporating the rights of the very poor in the enjoyment of economic and social rights.

Right to food

4. Training for local authorities in providing outreach services for the poorest populations (reception and food-distribution centres).

Right to minimum income

5. Special training for local authorities responsible for conducting social surveys needed for authorization of minimum income, in order to avoid hostile or racist reactions.

Right to health

6. Training for hospital and health centre managers in receiving persons living in extreme poverty.

D. Breaking of prostitution rings

1. Special police training in breaking up prostitution rings.

2. Ban on slavery and prostitution should be effective.

Pilot technical cooperation projects could be implemented quickly in this area. Some of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights (UNHCHR) framework programmes could be extended to deal with specific aspects of extremely poor groups. This would involve globalizing their aims or implementing pilot projects, such as the project to prepare a training manual for law-enforcement officials or that on the implementation of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education. Other programmes that could be used in this way include the one to promote national human rights institutions in Asia and the Pacific: Training Programme on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the global project to promote and protect the rights of internally displaced persons.

110. It is also necessary to designate in each country a body of social experts to ensure that the Government implemented international recommendations concretely and effectively. It could be a department of the national human rights institution, if one exists and is in operation, and could comprise social and educational experts. It should be independent of the Government, like the national institution itself.

VI. WOMEN IN EXTREME POVERTY

111. Poverty hits women especially hard and leads to serious violations of their rights. Extreme poverty can be linked with prostitution and with the exploitation, both sexual and physical (forced labour), of young girls from very poor backgrounds (prostitution and slavery rings). Unemployment and illiteracy are also particular problems for women. Women prisoners' conditions are in general an affront to their dignity. Local traditions sometimes make birth control impossible or are demeaning to women (no access to employment, forced marriage, very low age of marriage, no civil status for girls, etc.).

112. In practical terms, it would be useful to set up a women's affairs section in each police department, since women account for a large percentage of the extremely poor and, once they begin to be criminalized, they are more likely than men to fall victim to abuse of every kind. Similarly, police training should include a special component on respect for women's rights.

113. The most shocking situation is without doubt that of women prisoners, particularly those who are extremely poor. Those in prison for debt never have the money to pay their debts or fines. One possible way of dealing with this would be to set up reception centres run by trained staff.

114. The exponential increase in prostitution is a reflection of the spread of poverty. Prostitution is a cancer that must be excised from the activities on which trafficking, Mafia operations and corruption are based. The ultimate goal is a complete ban on prostitution, for its very existence is an affront to women's dignity.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

115. Extreme poverty means denying the enjoyment of all human rights to 1.3 billion people in the world, a majority of them women, thus violating their human dignity. Poverty is therefore the most massive cause of human rights violations in the world. Human dignity and the international community cannot accept this situation any longer, because eradicating poverty is an ethical, social, political and economic imperative.

116. Extreme poverty is thus a violation of all human rights, striking as it does at the two main human rights principles: the equal dignity of all human beings and the principle of non-discrimination. The poverty trap in which the poorest of the poor find themselves shows how human rights are indivisible and interdependent: the right to an adequate standard of living, to housing, to education, to work, to good health, to employment, to the protection of the family, to respect for privacy, to legal status and registration as a citizen, to life and physical integrity, to justice and participation in political, social and cultural life.

117. Society must also alter the way it looks at the poorest of the poor: the sense of dignity that inspires the very poor is no different from the human dignity of any other person. The socially excluded do not feel that their dignity is recognized or respected, since the most common response they receive from society is a policy of welfare rather than human rights for all.

118. Deep poverty can exclude people from society, placing them in an illegal situation in their own country. Such people perceive social service or police intervention as actions they cannot appeal, since justice is by and large out of their reach. Society should see the poor as people who are capable of thinking, reflecting and having something to say about poverty, the world and human rights. A better understanding of poverty and better policies to eradicate it can be developed only by understanding the poor themselves and therefore by working in partnership with them.

119. Human rights must be the basis for any policy to combat social exclusion and poverty, for they are a powerful tool for creating social cohesion and genuine democracy. Social exclusion should therefore be looked at from the standpoint of the indivisibility of human rights; social policy should be tolerant of cultural diversity; a voice should be given to those who have no voice; and violations of the human rights of the most deprived should be outlawed in the same way as torture.

120. Bodies responsible for curbing poverty should therefore collaborate more closely with NGOs working with very poor groups in the field. The contribution of those living in extreme poverty could be of decisive importance in current thinking on "sustainable human development" and the right to development, especially since the concept of development is no longer viewed only from an economic standpoint, but also in social and cultural terms.

121. The ideas of the poorest of the poor are therefore perfectly in order in the debates taking place in various international organizations (UNDP, the World Bank, IMF, UNHCHR, UNCTAD, WTO). Efforts to increase cooperation among various bodies should also be increased and continued, not only within the United Nations system, but also with other international and regional bodies and with and among NGOs.

122. Poverty eradication must therefore be consolidated as an absolute priority throughout the United Nations system, in the context of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006), to be carried out at both international and national levels. Development strategies must take fully into account the realization of human rights, the indicators provided for, and the full participation of the poorest people, in particular women, in drawing up and implementing appropriate national plans of action.

123. Combating poverty is feasible, but it costs about $80 billion a year, which implies important transfers of resources through international cooperation. Donor countries should urgently reverse the decline in their official development assistance to developing countries, which amounted to just 0.25 per cent of GDP in 1996. The General Assembly call upon developed countries to commit themselves to the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of GNP for overall development assistance should be emphasized, as well as the Assembly's call upon both developed and developing countries to allocate 20 per cent of their official development assistance and 20 per cent of their national budget, respectively, to basic social programmes. The 20/20 Initiative should include basic education, primary health care, including reproductive health and population programmes, nutrition programmes and safe drinking water and sanitation, as well as the institutional capacity for delivering those services.

124. At the national level, it is the Government's political will that is the key to success. Implementation of the human rights of the very poor is not necessarily expensive. The poor may be found in every country; even rich countries have two categories, namely, poor indigenous populations and poor migrants from developing countries - asylum seekers, undocumented (illegal) migrants, and refugees, political or otherwise. In every case, the right to civil status extends the right to life to thousands of children (girls in particular) who live in extreme poverty. This simple right saves their life, for it keeps them away from those who traffic in human beings.

125. Combating extreme poverty and implementing the rights of the poorest of the poor involves designing and funding a range of basic social services which reach out to the very poor, and ensuring respect for human rights, in particular within the judicial system and by the police.

126. Our age is characterized by globalization, and the technical revolution underway must comprise democratic and social aspects. The implementation of human rights and the eradication of extreme poverty will mark the first steps towards global progress. Economic globalization must be conceived as a balance between the free market and the role of the State, in particular as regards the provision of essential social services.

127. One of the most important aspects of poverty is individual mobility: every two years, one third of poor people climb out of poverty but their place is taken by others. Poverty is thus a process rather than a condition. In addition, the poorest of the poor are frequently the forgotten groups in countries where there is no rule of law; the fight against corruption and for the rule of law is thus a fight for respect for the very poor.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Universal ratification of relevant instruments

128. The 54 States - with a total population of 2.5 billion - that have not yet ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, are urged to do so. Similarly, all States should be encouraged to ratify the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. States should, on request, be able to receive any technical cooperation they may need from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

129. Moreover, the draft optional protocols to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, making it possible for their monitoring bodies to receive individual communications, are of great importance.

130. The protection of economic, social and cultural rights would be reinforced by the ratification of regional instruments, such as the European Social Charter (Revised), and the "Protocol of San Salvador" on economic, social and cultural rights.

B. Minimum guaranteed income

131. All domestic legislation should guarantee the right of every person to whom it applies to a guaranteed minimum income by making the necessary budgetary appropriations. This right would facilitate access to the individual rights that are the basis of essential social services: social and medical welfare, food, housing, employment, training, schooling, education and culture. Extreme poverty should under no circumstances be a justification for the violation of human rights. As regards health, the State should implement programmes covering primary health-care charges, hygiene questions and specific diseases connected with extreme poverty.

C. Resources

132. The international community should express its solidarity with third-world States by aiming to devote 0.7 per cent of the national budget to official development assistance. It should also encourage the 20/20 Initiative and a transfer of resources - international as well as domestic - from the military sector to the social sector.

133. The world economic situation would be more equitable if capital flows were regulated and the unsustainable external debt of the highly indebted poor countries cancelled, and if a start was made on the democratic reform of international financial and trade institutions.

134. The adoption of framework legislation on microfinance, acceptable to domestic banking systems and prioritizing women's needs should make it easier for microenterprises to embark on new projects and thereby create work and reduce poverty.

D. Local social welfare bodies

135. Local authorities, through their UNDP-based network of towns against poverty, are well placed to develop local social welfare facilities by providing them with the resources and the powers necessary to identify poverty and distribute welfare effectively. The role of local authorities in maintaining civil registers is also important.

136. Local institutions should also give citizens, including the poorest among them, opportunities to become involved and participate in decision-making processes by promoting more equitable, transparent and accountable institutions.

E. Occupational reintegration programmes

137. Job-creation programmes should set aside a number of jobs for the extremely poor. Domestic legislation should also promote policies to assist entry or re-entry to the labour market by prioritizing specific action on behalf of the poorest segments of the population: women, single mothers, children, migrants, members of minorities and indigenous populations, the disabled, internally displaced persons, older people and the homeless.

F. Human rights information and education for the poorest of the poor

138. Special human rights education techniques must be developed in order to reach persons living in extreme poverty, many of whom are illiterate. Information should be transmitted in a simple fashion, using national media and outreach techniques, by the local authorities in the areas where such groups live. This information should be supplemented by simple manuals and strip cartoons showing what services are available.

139. In addition, the human rights education components developed by UNHCHR for the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education should be supplemented by materials suitable for extremely poor groups. Emphasis should be placed on the right to reject socially exclusive or racist behaviour on the right to food, to housing, to education and to health, and women's right to reject violence.

G. The poorest of the poor in prisons

140. Extreme poverty causes many persons to fall foul of the law, and it is they who constitute the vast majority of the prison population. After having served their term in prison, the poorest remain there because they are unable to pay their fines. Judicial procedure should therefore be adjusted to take account of this situation, alternatives to prison should be found and court officials given special training.

H. Access to justice

141. Each State should find specific ways of ensuring that legal aid and legal counsel is available free of charge to all persons living in extreme poverty. Appropriate training should be given to the experts concerned.

142. Alternatives to judicial proceedings, such as mediation, should also be encouraged provided they are free choices. Mediation must, however, be conditional on full respect for human rights and not become a substitute for judicial remedies; it could be used in both individual and group disputes, as well as to prevent disputes.

I. Social workers

143. Social workers have always been the main point of contact for the socially excluded, many of whom regard them as wielding enormous power and whose decisions can rarely be discussed or appealed. They should therefore be trained to assume a role as human rights agents and as experts on the lives of the poorest and most marginalized.

J. Technical assistance

144. A technical assistance programme to ensure respect for the rights of the poorest of the poor should be available to any Government on request. Special training programmes should be developed for social workers and court officials, as well as for members of the police force, since people living in extreme poverty regularly come into contact with the police in their daily life (through begging, stealing to live, or being homeless in the streets). Criminalization can be a very rapid process unless police officers have had suitable training. Relations between the police and welfare bodies should be the responsibility of a special police department.

K. Combating corruption

145. Corruption undermines democracy and disrupts the process of collecting taxes and redistributing them among those living in extreme poverty. Social democratization polices should be adopted to ensure respect for human rights in countries affected by corruption.

L. The impact of armed conflicts

146. Refugees and internally displaced persons - often the poorest of the poor - should be given priority in State social policy. Programmes to regularize the situation of undocumented migrants should be adopted by host

countries. Access to education is the key factor in integrating migrants, and contact with migrants' countries of origin also constitutes a promising approach.

147. International economic sanctions, particularly when imposed by the Security Council, should be conceived in such a way as to avoid aggravating conditions of extreme poverty in the countries concerned. In particular, they should be compatible with the effective exercise of human rights - and especially economic, social and cultural rights - by civilians.

M. Draft declaration

148. A meeting with the independent expert should be organized in 1999 in order to draw up for the international community the basic elements of a preliminary draft declaration on human rights and extreme poverty. The draft should use as its starting point the preamble common to the two international Covenants of 1966, as well as other relevant instruments which recognize that the ideal of the free individual, delivered from fear and poverty, cannot be achieved without the creation of conditions allowing each person to enjoy all human rights.

149. The draft should call on States to base their anti-poverty policy on human rights that aim at the eradication, rather than the reduction, of poverty. It should also provide guarantees for the future after poverty has been eradicated. State strategies, devised in partnership with the populations involved and their representative organizations, should aim at enabling the poorest of the poor to exercise the full range of rights and freedoms granted to citizens in their country.

Notes

1/ UNDP, Overcoming Human Poverty, New York, 1998. The information attributed to UNDP in the present report comes from this publication, unless ctherwise noted.

2/ Development and Human Rights: The Role of the World Bank, Washington D.C., 1998, p. 2. The information attributed to the World Bank in the present report comes from this publication, unless otherwise noted.

3/ UNDP, Human Development Report 1997, New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press 1997, p. 93.